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SUBJECT: FRANCE: 2006 COUNTRY REPORT ON TERRORISM

REF: STATE 177128

1. In 2006, France continued to pursue aggressive counterterrorism measures, including the dismantling of terror networks on its territory, notably those assisting in the recruitment or financing of terrorists to Iraq. French terrorism officials remained on high alert since the London subway bombings in 2005, and continued to conduct extensive investigations into Islamic terrorism on French soil. The French government arrested approximately 70 people in 2006 on charges related to Islamic terrorism. In September, French authorities announced they had arrested their 400th suspect in connection with Islamic terrorism since the September 11 attacks in the U.S. More than 150 of those have been jailed.

2. In September the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) announced its union with al-Qaeda and declared France to be its number one target. Several high profile events in 2006 -- including the local publication of the Danish Mohammed cartoon pictorials, heated debate on the interdiction of the veil in French public institutions, and the presence of French troops in Afghanistan and Lebanon -- have been cited by various French authorities as factors manipulated by Islamic extremists to incite violence against the country. France's chief counterterrorism judge, Jean-Louis Bruguiere, maintains that all terrorist threats currently faced by France can be directly linked to Iraq. In May, intelligence officials announced that 29 people had been detained in France for suspected association with terror networks related to Iraq. In September, officials noted that at least nine terrorists whose journey to Iraq began in France have been killed, with two incarcerated and another 12-15 likely still engaged in combat against Coalition forces. Increasing Islamic radicalization in the local prison system also continues to worry French officials.

3. On January 23 the French government adopted new counterterrorism legislation that considerably strengthened police powers in criminal law and codified some current practices. Preliminary detention for terrorism suspects was extended from a maximum of four to up to six days. Current legislation allows the state to thereafter place suspects in

pre-trial detention for up to four years when the evidence is strong or when they present an imminent threat. The law gives the government additional powers for the freezing of assets, video and telephone surveillance, allows increased monitoring of public transport records, and grants broader powers of official access to connection data held by internet cafes and to various personal data records. Sentences for convicted terrorists were increased from 20 to 30 years for leading or organizing an attack, and from 10 to 20 years for assisting a terrorist organization or operation. The new law also reinforced existing legislation that allows for the revocation of French nationality and eventual expulsion if the terrorist became a citizen through naturalization within the preceding 15 years.

14. Under the auspices of the Prime Minister, the French government published its White Paper on terrorism on March 7. The paper, a publicly available document, sets out the government's overall policy efforts to combat terrorism. It includes attack scenarios, threat analyses, and technical as well as political responses to terrorism.

15. At the political and diplomatic level, France continued its active engagement with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Counterterrorism Committee (CTC), the G-8's Counter-Terrorism Action Group (CTAG), the UN's 1267 Sanctions Committee (for the Taliban and al-Qaeda), and the European Council's Anti-Terrorism Strategy action plan. France is a founding member of the joint U.S./Russia Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism which was inaugurated in October. France is a member and contributor to both the Proliferation and Container Security Initiatives. The U.S. and France maintain regular bilateral counterterrorism consultations. France has also signed and ratified 12 of the

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13 UN counterterrorism conventions. It signed, but has not yet ratified, the Convention for the Prevention of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism.

16. On the military front, French Special Forces participated in coalition operations in Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). France is also a key participant in Coalition Task Force (CTF) 150, a multinational naval force that patrols the Red Sea and Gulf of Yemen to interdict the movement of suspected terrorists between Afghanistan, the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa. It has twice commanded the Task Force and will assume command for a third time next year. France's overall contributions in Afghanistan increased in 2006 and France currently commands the International Security Assistance Force's (ISAF) Regional Command - Kabul. France is also a chief contributor to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with more than 1600 troops, which is under the command of a French General through February 2007. UNIFIL's mission includes assisting the Lebanese Armed forces to secure its territory, including against Hizballah.

17. France continued to develop competencies and capabilities of TRACFIN, the Ministry of Finance's terrorism financing coordination and investigation unit. Within the European Union, France played an active role in the Clearinghouse, the EU process for designation terrorist organizations. France has not designated HAMAS-affiliated charities, such as the French based Comité de Bienfaisance et Secours aux Palestiniens (Committee for the Well-Being and Assistance to Palestinians), arguing that it has no proven links to terrorism. France also continued to oppose any EU designation of Lebanese Hizballah as a terrorist organization, although it supported Hizballah's eventual disarmament, which it maintained would result in Hizballah's gradual integration into Lebanese politics.

18. The government continued its policy of expelling non-French citizens engaged in terrorist activities or speech that promoted hate or incited violence. Among those ordered

expelled from France during 2006 were at least 20 imams from Algeria, Bangladesh, Morocco, and Pakistan. Chelali Benchellali, an Algerian imam resident in France since 1961, was expelled to Algeria in September. He was convicted to six months, time served, in June of contributing to a Chechnyan network terrorist plot. Several of Benchellali,s family members were also convicted on similar terrorism charges. His youngest son, Mourad, was a Guantamano detainee for more than three years and is still facing trial in France.

¶9. The government also exercised its power to repeal French citizenship and deport convicted terrorists. Adel Tebourski, a Tunisian and French dual-national citizen, who was arrested in 2001 and sentenced in 2005 for his contribution to the September 9, 2001 assassination of Afghan War Chief Ahmad Shah Massood, was stripped of his French nationality by decree on July 19, and expelled to Tunisia on August 7. Karim Bourti, a French GSPC supporter, was also stripped of his citizenship in May.

¶10. Since May 2005, the government revoked the security clearances of 72 individuals working in private companies at Paris, Charles de Gaulle international airport. The majority of those were announced in early November 2006. A handful of those concerned brought legal action against the government and were subsequently reinstated. The government claimed that the individuals, while not terrorists, posed a security risk to the airport based on background checks that showed Islamic extremist sympathies. The Prefect charged with governing the area noted that background checks are conducted on a regular basis and that a number of security clearances are revoked annually.

¶11. Key judicial proceedings in 2006 on Islamic terrorism related crimes included:

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- On June 13, 25 Islamic militants tied to a Chechen jihad network that allegedly planned to bomb a commercial center in Paris and the Eiffel Tower were sentenced in June. Several members of the group, including Menad Benchellali and Merouane Benhamed, received the maximum sentence of 10 years.

- Five of six former Guantanamo detainees who were expelled to France in 2004 and 2005 are currently no longer in detention (they were initially detained for many months after their arrival in France). Brahim Yadel, however, remains in custody for violating the terms of his conditional release. All six former detainees face further charges in France for terrorist conspiracy. In September 2006 the trial was halted when a judge ordered further investigations into the role of alleged visits of French intelligence authorities to Guantanamo. The trial is scheduled to reconvene on May 2, ¶2007.

- Karim Mehdi, a Moroccan national, was sentenced to nine years on October 26 for terrorism related activities. Mehdi is alleged to have ties with September 11 terrorists (Ramzi bin al Shaibah and Ziad Jarrah) and is suspected of planning an attack on the island of Reunion in 2003. Mehdi will also be deported following his sentence and not allowed in France for a minimum of six years.

- Rachid Ramda, who was extradited to France from the UK in December 2005 after ten years in detention, was sentenced to ten years on March 29 for his role in the 1995 Paris subway and train attacks.

- On November 12, France,s chief counterterrorism judge, Jean-Louis Bruguiere, sent the cases of three suspects allegedly connected to the 2002 Djerba, Tunisia attacks, to the Paris Court of Assizes. Khalid Cheik Mohammed, Christian Ganczarski and Walid Nawar are suspected of assisting convicted terrorist Belgacem Nawar in the Djerba al-Qaeda attacks whose victims included two French citizens. Cheik

Mohammed remains in U.S. custody at Guantanamo.

¶12. Three individuals were detained in France in late November (two on November 25 and one on November 29) after being expelled from Syria. They are suspected of attempting to transit through Syria in order to join insurgents fighting against Coalition forces in Iraq. Another nine individuals were deported from Egypt in mid-December under similar same charges. However all were released after a brief period of detention.

¶13. French police cooperated closely with Spanish authorities in the Basque region throughout 2006. Several arms caches were discovered in France, and a number of arrests of Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA) suspects were made throughout the year. Several were extradited to Spain. One attack, allegedly claimed by Ipparetarek or an Ipparetarak sympathizer (a defunct French Basque nationalist group), occurred in France on June 11 against the Hotel Ostap, owned by famed chef Alain Ducasse. There were no injuries and only minimal damage.

¶14. During the first six months of 2006, 176 attacks or attempted attacks occurred on the French island of Corsica. 112 of those were claimed by the National Front for the Liberation of Corsica- Combatants Union, or by the National Front for the Liberation of Corsica of October 22. Three people, including two military personnel, were superficially wounded in 2006. Three terrorists were killed during the year by accident while attempting to carry out attacks. The government has a widespread police presence in the region and arrested dozens of people throughout the year in connection with various attacks. The groups tend to target secondary residences, and avoid serious damage or casualties. Separatist groups appear to have largely given up their political battle for independence but continue to wage an intimidation campaign aimed at foreigners or mainland French citizens interested in permanent residence or secondary homes

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on the small island.

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